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Citation for published version:

Robbins, J 2017, 'Escribió a Italia. Vinieron los pintores': Bolognese *quadratura*, Illusionism and Velázquez's *Las Meninas*, *Bulletin of Spanish Studies*, vol. N/A, pp. 1-25.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/14753820.2017.1345145>

Digital Object Identifier (DOI):

[10.1080/14753820.2017.1345145](https://doi.org/10.1080/14753820.2017.1345145)

Link:

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

Document Version:

Peer reviewed version

Published In:

Bulletin of Spanish Studies

Publisher Rights Statement:

This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis in Bulletin of Spanish Studies on 31/7/2017, available online: <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14753820.2017.1345145>.

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‘Escribió a Italia. Vinieron los pintores’: Bolognese *quadratura*, Illusionism and Diego de Velázquez’s *Las meninas*

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The work in Madrid of the Bolognese *quadraturisti* Angelo Michele Colonna (1604-87) and Agostino Mitelli (1609-60) had a profound impact on the development of High Baroque art in Spain in the second half of the seventeenth century. Their influence was felt not simply on the development of fresco, their medium, but also on painting, Claudio Coello’s illusionistic tour de force, the *Sagrada Forma* (1685-90), being testament to the latter, as I have proposed elsewhere.¹ Here I want to argue that they also had an impact prior to their actual residence in Spain, specifically on the Golden Age’s greatest artist, Velázquez, and on his masterpiece, the *Meninas* (1656). Picking up on Brown’s comment that ‘it is reasonable to interpret *Las Meninas* in the specific context of Baroque illusionism’,² I want to place the *Meninas* not simply within the context of such illusionism, but specifically within that of Baroque *quadratura*, especially as exemplified by two of its greatest practitioners, Colonna and Mitelli, for it is their form of spatial illusionism that had a significant impact on Velázquez’s masterpiece and not, for example, Pietro da Cortona’s. In so situating the *Meninas*, I am not suggesting that specific schemes by the pair are direct sources for the *Meninas*, but that this work was, in part, Velázquez’s magisterial response to the creative challenge posed by the *quadratura* practice of these Bolognese artists. Put simply, and without downplaying the significance of other works and other artists for the *Meninas*, their work was a major impetus behind both his decision to explore illusionistic space at this late stage in his career and the manner in which he did so.³ But, not surprisingly, different means and styles to broadly similar ends produced very different effects that highlight distinct forms of illusionism and of engagement with the viewer and their senses. Brown has commented that, in general, Velázquez’s ‘relationship with Italian painting was as much a debate as a dialogue’.⁴ This is certainly true where Colonna and Mitelli are concerned, for the pair were arguably the irritant, the grain of sand, that led to his finest pearl.

My discussion will be divided into four parts. In the first, I shall give an account of Velázquez’s role in the engagement of Colonna and Mitelli during his second journey to Italy and, on the grounds that the *Meninas* was painted after that journey but prior to the arrival of the *quadraturisti* in Madrid, consider what works by the pair Velázquez might have seen in Italy. I shall also briefly characterise their distinctive *quadratura* and distinguish it from other forms of Italian illusionism. Second, I shall suggest anxiety in the face of their arrival as one motive force for Velázquez’s unprecedented exploration of space in his masterpiece. I shall then, third, consider the similarities and differences between their respective works as part of contextualising the *Meninas* within the *quadratura* practice of Colonna and Mitelli before finally turning to explore briefly their correspondingly distinct forms of illusionism.

Velázquez in Italy (1649-51), Colonna and Mitelli to Spain (1650-58)

One objective of Velázquez’s second visit to Italy (1649-51) was to engage an artist to decorate the Alcázar, there being no Spanish artists trained in fresco painting.⁵ Velázquez initially sought the services of Pietro da Cortona. In

¹ ‘Baroque Space: Claudio Coello’s *Sagrada forma* and the Sacristy of the Escorial’, *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies*, 86 (2009), 775-86.

² Jonathan Brown, ‘On the Meaning of *Las Meninas*’, in *Collected Writings on Velázquez*, with an introductory essay by Bonaventura Bassegoda (Madrid: CEEH, 2008), 47-75 (p.60).

³ One such frequently discussed work, for example, is Van Eyck’s *Arnolfini Wedding Portrait*.

⁴ Brown, ‘Velázquez and Italy’, in *Collected Writings*, 387-403 (p.403)

⁵ For the most detailed account of Velázquez’s second visit, see Salvador Salort Pons, *Velázquez en Italia* (Madrid: Fundación de Apoyo a la Historia del Arte Hispánico, 2002), 83-145. See also Pilar Silva Maroto, ‘En torno al segundo viaje de Velázquez a Italia’, in *Symposium Internacional Velázquez: Actas* (Seville: Junta de Andalucía,

a letter of 22 Nov 1649 to Virgilio Malvezzi, Velázquez writes that he had favourably revised his initially dismissive opinion of Cortona specifically in the light of the latter's ceiling fresco, the *Triumph of Divine Providence* (1633-39), celebrating the Barberini pope, Urban VIII, in the Barberini palace in Rome.⁶ Attempts to secure Cortona were unsuccessful, however, and learning this, the king instructed the Spanish ambassador in Rome to secure a suitable replacement to return to Madrid with Velázquez.⁷ Aided in this by Malvezzi, Velázquez secured the services of Colonna and Mitelli.⁸ Though 'secured' is perhaps too strong a word here, for, despite what the secretary to the Duke of Modena, Geminiano Poggi, wrote to the duke in a letter of 12 Dec 1650, namely that Velázquez had apparently told him that the plan was for the *quadraturisti* to shortly sail with him from Genoa to Spain ('frà pochi giorni saranno insieme à Genova'⁹), the pair did not actually leave Italy until 1658, arriving in Madrid in early September. The cause or causes of the delay are not known—personal reasons may have been a factor.¹⁰ But, as Salort Pons notes, the brief timescale between Velázquez's meeting with Colonna and Mitelli (probably in Bologna in early Dec 1650 following his departure from Rome) and his meeting with Poggi (12 Dec) would hardly have been sufficient for the Bolognese artists to arrange matters for their own departure.¹¹ (As it turned out, Velázquez's own departure was not as imminent as Poggi suggests; the artist actually arrived back in Madrid 23 June 1651, and there is no documented information on him in Italy after January of that year.¹²)

Whatever the reason for their not immediately going to Spain in 1650/51, there was obviously an on-going attempt by the Spanish court, however sporadic, to bring the pair to Spain in the years that followed, and, given the attempts of the French court to secure their services in the 1650s—Mitelli's son claims Mazarin offered financial inducements to the pair to go to Paris, and that his father had a French passport in his possession just prior to his departure for Spain¹³—, García Cueto's suggestion that political and thence cultural rivalry between Madrid and Paris may have been a factor in Spain's continued pursuit of the *quadratura* artists seems probable.¹⁴ (Another factor may also have simply been that they were the only fresco artists other than Cortona who Velázquez could personally vouch for after his second sojourn in Italy.) Following Velázquez's initial lack of success, Malvasia mentions a second attempt by Girolamo Boncompagni to engage the pair—sometime prior to or in 1654, as can be gauged from a letter by Colonna written in February that year—but this failed too.¹⁵ And Aterido has speculated that Velázquez's unsuccessful attempt to gain permission to go to Italy a third time in 1657 might have used as an argument in its favour finally bringing the Bolognese artists to Spain.¹⁶ Their eventual departure in 1658 followed a decisive intervention by Cardinal Carlo de' Medici, the Cardinal having been written to by Juan Bautista

Consejería de Cultura, 2004), 139-52. The pioneering article on Velázquez's second sojourn in Italy, first published in 1960, is Enriqueta Harris, 'La misión de Velázquez en Italia' in Harris, *Estudios completos sobre Velázquez / Complete Studies on Velázquez*, edited by José Luis Colomer (Madrid: CEEH, 2006), 45-77.

⁶ See *Corpus velazqueño: documentos y textos*, edited by Ángel Aterido Fernández, vol. I (Madrid: Ministerio de Educación, Cultura y Deporte, 2010), no.244, 211. And José Luis Colomer, "'Dar a Su Magestad algo Bueno": Four Letters from Velázquez to Virgilio Malvezzi', *Burlington Magazine*, 135 (1993), 67-72 (72).

⁷ *Corpus velazqueño*, no.257, 226-27.

⁸ *Corpus velazqueño*, no.262, 229.

⁹ *Corpus velazqueño*, no.269, 233.

¹⁰ Aida Anguiano de Miguel, 'Angelo Michele Colonna: sus aportaciones a la pintura barroca decorativa en Italia', *Anales de Historia del Arte*, 8 (1998), 197-222 (p.210).

¹¹ Salort Pons, *Velázquez en Italia*, 160-62.

¹² Salort Pons, *Velázquez en Italia*, 133.

¹³ David García Cueto, *La estancia española de los pintores boloñeses: Agostino Mitelli y Angelo Michele Colonna, 1658-1662* (Granada: Universidad de Granada, 2005), 72, 73.

¹⁴ García Cueto, *Estancia*, 72.

¹⁵ Carlo Cesare Malvasia, *Felsina pittrice. Vite de pittori bolognesi*, vol. II (Bologna: Domenico Barbieri, 1678), 407. Colonna's letter of 14 Feb 1654 to Marchese Filippo Niccolini, which contains his own summary account of Spanish attempts to employ him in Spain, is in Riccardo Spinelli's edition of correspondence, *Angelo Michele Colonna e Agostino Mitelli in Toscana e in Spagna* (Pisa: Pacini Editore, 2011), 98-99. On Boncompagni's attempt, see also Salort Pons, *Velázquez en Italia* (162, 271) and García Cueto, *Estancia* (82).

¹⁶ Ángel Aterido, 'Mitelli, Colonna, Velázquez y la pintura mural en la corte de Felipe IV', in *España y Bolonia: Siete siglos de relaciones artísticas y culturales*, edited by José Luis Colomer and Amadeo Serra Desfilis (Madrid: Fundación Carolina and CEEH, 2006), 241-64 (p.243).

Nicolalde, secretary to the Spanish ambassador in Rome, with an offer to the Bolognese artists.¹⁷ And Velázquez himself may well have played an active part in this; according to Martínez, writing in the 1670s, the king decided to decorate with fresco the palaces and ordered Velázquez to bring two artists from Italy, with the result that, in Martínez's two concise sentences, the artist 'Escribió a Italia. Vinieron los pintores'.¹⁸

Once in Madrid, Colonna and Mitelli were initially tried out by being set to decorate a part of the Alcázar façade.¹⁹ This was followed by three rooms in the king's quarters in the Cuarto Bajo of the Alcázar.²⁰ (The *Meninas* hung in the room in this suite whose ceiling was frescoed with the Fall of Phaeton.²¹) They then went on to work in the major ceremonial room of the palace, the Salón de los Espejos, as well as in the Buen Retiro. Certainly, the art-loving king paid close attention to their work: when decorating the ceilings of the Cuarto Bajo, a ladder was specially installed for Philip to see their progress;²² and Palomino records the king and royal family visiting to watch the execution of their decoration of the Salón de los Espejos.²³

If the *quadratura* of Colonna and Mitelli was a stimulus and a goad that lead Velázquez to create the *Meninas*, then one remaining question about his second visit to Italy remains, namely what work he might have seen by the pair during that visit. It seems clear from his 24 Sep 1650 letter to Malvezzi that he had not at that date seen any of their work.²⁴ Before departing Rome, he could obviously have taken the opportunity to see the Sala Grande in the Palazzo Spada, frescoed by the Bolognese pair in 1635-36.²⁵ Leaving Rome and on his way north to Venice and then eventually to Genoa, from where he eventually sailed to Spain, Velázquez visited Florence sometime between 26 Nov and 6 Dec 1650, as letters between the Spanish ambassador in Rome, the Duke of Infantado, and Cardinal Prince Carlo de' Medici testify.²⁶ There he could have taken the opportunity to see Colonna and Mitelli's suite of three rooms in the ground floor summer apartments of the Pitti Palace (1637-41): the Public Audience chamber (completed 1639), the Private Audience chamber (1640), and a third large antechamber (1641).²⁷ He then went to Modena where, as we learn from the 12 Dec letter from Poggi to the Duke, he was deflected from the ducal palace to the palace in Sassuolo since Poggi was reluctant to allow the artist to view the collections in Modena in the duke's absence, telling the Spaniard that he didn't have the key to the collection in

¹⁷ See Mitelli's letter of 16 April 1658 to the Cardinal in Salort Pons, *Velázquez en Italia*, 485, doc.b56; and García Cueto, *Estancia*, 84 (with Mitelli's son's account) and 85-86 (for Nicolalde).

¹⁸ Jusepe Martínez, *Discursos practicables del nobilísimo arte de la pintura*, edited by María Elena Manrique Ara (Madrid: Cátedra, 2006), 242. Martínez's account is truncated and lacking in dates, so he is possibly conflating what happened in 1649-51 and 1658. He refers to the two Italians as 'los Colonna'.

¹⁹ García Cueto, *Estancia*, 106.

²⁰ García Cueto, *Estancia*, 107-16.

²¹ García Cueto, *Estancia*, 109. García Cueto suggests that an inventory reference to the ceiling as depicting Apollo was due to an interpretative error (108). See also John F. Moffitt, 'Velázquez in the Alcázar Palace in 1656: The Meaning of the *mise-en-scène* of *Las meninas*', *Art History*, 6 (1983), 271-300 (p.281), where the ceiling is also described as depicting Apollo. On the works hung in this suite of rooms, and their general decoration, see Gloria Martínez Leiva and Ángel Rodríguez Rebollo, *El Inventario del Alcázar de Madrid de 1666: Felipe IV y su colección artística* (Madrid: CSIC, 2015), 128-29, 136-41.

²² Steven N. Orso, *Philip IV and the Decoration of the Alcázar of Madrid* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 70; Giuseppina Raggi, 'Note sul viaggio in Spagna di Angelo Michele Colonna e Agostino Mitelli', *Anuario del Departamento de Historia y Teoría del Arte*, 14 (2002), 151-66 (p.152); also García Cueto, *Estancia*, 114.

²³ Antonio A. Palomino, *Vida de don Diego Velázquez de Silva*, edited by Miguel Morán Turina (Madrid: Akal, 2008), 49.

²⁴ *Corpus velazqueño*, no.262, 229. And on this inference, see Colomer ('"Dar a Su Magestad algo Bueno"', 69) and García Cueto (*Estancia*, 66).

²⁵ On the involvement of Mitelli in decorating the Sala Grande, see Ebria Feinblatt, *Seventeenth-Century Bolognese Ceiling Decoration* (Santa Barbara: Fithian Press, 1992), 59.

²⁶ *Corpus velazqueño*, nos.268 and 269, 232.

²⁷ On Mitelli's actual contribution in the first two rooms, see Ebria Feinblatt, 'Angelo Michele Colonna: a Profile', *Burlington Magazine*, 121 (1979), 618-30 (p.625) and Nadia Bastogi, 'Le sale affrescate da Angelo Michele Colonna e Agostino Mitelli', in *Fasto do Corte: La decorazione murale nella residenze dei Medici e dei Lorena*, vol. II, *L'età di Ferdinando II de' Medici (1628-1670)*, edited by Mina Gregori (Florence: Edifir, 2006), 60-82 (pp.62, 65, 66-68).

Modena.²⁸ In Sassuolo, he would certainly have seen their work in the Gran Salone (1646-48), one of their most impressive decorative schemes, as well as their extensive *quadratura* frescoes on the exterior of the palace, most of which are no longer extant.²⁹ The Sala Grande in the Spada has all four walls decorated with fictive architecture but has a real coffered ceiling. In contrast, in the three rooms in the Pitti Palace, as in the Gran Salone at Sassuolo, Colonna and Mitelli created an immersive virtual reality, ceilings and walls being decorated into a seamless whole that incorporates and echoes the rooms' real architectural features and, equally, extends space outwards and, dramatically so in the Pitti, upwards by means of the fusion of fictive architectural space with real space.³⁰

The *quadratura* exemplified by the work of Colonna and Mitelli was a distinct variant of the illusionism that came to dominate large-scale decorative schemes in Baroque Europe. It differed both from Renaissance *quadratura* and, also, from other forms of palace decoration that spread across the continent alongside it. The later, as typified by Cortona's hugely influential work in the reception rooms on the *piano nobile* of the Pitti Palace (1640s), employed ceiling paintings which celebrated, by means of Classical mythology, the commissioning dynasty and which were framed with gilded decoration and stucco figures, swags and ornaments to create an overwhelming impression of material and dynastic splendour.³¹ *Quadratura*, in contrast, frescoed walls and/or ceilings with illusionistic architecture and replaced the three-dimensional stucco statues, telemones and atlantids with strikingly effective *trompe l'œil* equivalents. Initially, this took the form of simply replacing the actual walls and ceilings with illusionistic ones and incorporating into these fictive columns, pilasters and alcoves as well as, on occasion, fictive doors and windows. In other words, the illusion substitutes actual walls and ceilings at the 'surface' level, architecturally speaking. Veronese's frescoes at the Villa Barbaro (1560-61) are an excellent early example of this. Such 'surface' *quadratura*, replacing architectural elements like-with-like, continued into the eighteenth century. But developing alongside it was a form of full-blown *quadratura* in which Bolognese artists became pre-eminent. This had an early precursor in Baldassarre Peruzzi's Sala delle Prospettive (1519) in the Villa Farnesina in Rome, but it was in the seventeenth century that it came to dominate interior decoration. Such *quadratura* created the illusion that (architectural) space continues *beyond* the walls and *above* the ceiling. The real walls and/or ceilings are not simply replaced with simulacra but disappear altogether as space itself is extended from the real into the fictive. The effect is scenographic: we look into a further inhabitable space that is exactly coterminous with the space we inhabit as viewers. Rooms are made thereby to appear larger and ceilings higher than they actually are, and the illusionism is so strong that the viewer feels they could walk from real space into the fictive spaces presented as directly continuing or leading off from it. Such illusionism is possible both through a mastery of linear perspective and because the illusion created is scaled one-to-one with the viewer's space. Colonna and Mitelli were prime exemplars of this style of immersive illusionism.

Why now? The Creative Challenge of Colonna and Mitelli

²⁸ *Corpus velazqueño*, no.269, 233. For Velázquez's second visit to Modena, see Colomer, "Dar a Su Magestad algo bueno", 71, and García Cueta, *Estancia*, 67. For Florence, see Edward L. Goldberg, 'Diego Velázquez's Visit to Florence in 1650', *Paragone*, 44 (1993), 92-96.

²⁹ For a detailed contemporary description of their frescoed courtyard at Sassuolo, see *Ducale Palazzo di Sassuolo*, edited by Massimo Pirondini (Genoa: Edizioni Spiga, 1982), 75-76. For Colonna and Mitelli's courtyard scheme, and one of their drawings for part of it, see Alice Jarrard, *Architecture as Performance in Seventeenth-Century Europe: Court Ritual in Modena, Rome, and Paris* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 126, 129. On Velázquez's visit to Sassuolo, see Filippo Trevisani, 'Ospiti illustri a Sassuolo: vita di corte nella delizia estense', in *Il Palazzo di Sassuolo: Delizia dei Duchi d'Este*, edited by Filipp Trevisani (Parma: Grafiche Step, 2004), 207-18 (pp.211-14).

³⁰ For other works by Colonna that Velázquez could possibly have seen during his second stay in Italy, see Colonna's own list of his work in Feinblatt, 'Angelo Michele Colonna: a Profile', 629.

³¹ As mentioned above, Velázquez favourably revised his opinion of Cortona in the light of his Barbarini ceiling. That ceiling contains a *trompe l'œil* architectural frame, but this is subservient to the dominant mythological and allegorical narrative elements inserted into it in a way that is not typical of full-blown *quadratura*. Velázquez's spatial illusionism is distinct from Cortona's style of illusionism here. As I shall argue, it is akin rather to Bolognese *quadratura* as perfected by Colonna and Mitelli precisely because of the dominance of the architectural space that the figures realistically inhabit.

After his definitive move to Madrid in 1623, Velázquez was renowned as a portraitist. Although he won, with his now-lost history painting, *The Expulsion of the Moriscos*, the competition that had been set up in 1627 precisely because envious rivals said he could paint only heads,³² it was only with his first stay in Italy (1629-31) that he confidently depicted three-dimensional pictorial space in the *Forge of Vulcan* and *Joseph's Coat Presented to Jacob*, returning from that first trip, as Martínez specifically notes, 'muy mejorado en el arte perspectiva y arquitectura'.³³ In the 1630s and 1640s, portraits dominated his output, so it is perhaps all the more surprising that, at a late stage in his career, and after an apparent general reluctance to engage with perspectival space, he painted the *Meninas* which is, amongst many other things, a powerful if enigmatic portrayal of fictional space, the enigma arising precisely through its illusive engagement with the real space of the viewer. So why did Velázquez paint such a painting—'unique in the artist's oeuvre' and a 'deliberate showpiece' in Brown's words³⁴—at this stage in his career?

A key part of an answer is Velázquez's exposure to *quadratura* in Italy in 1649-51 and his direct knowledge of Colonna and Mitelli who were being so actively sort by Philip. As we have seen, the Italians were hired and eventually came to Madrid as a consequence of Velázquez's mediation during, and potentially after, his second stay in Italy. But even before their arrival, the artists were an important catalyst—one amongst many, of course—for Velázquez's meditation on space and its representation that resulted in the *Meninas*. The idea of the *Meninas* as an artistic manifesto, specifically as a statement concerning the status of art, has long dominated interpretation of the work, but its creative dialogue with spatial illusionism as typified by Colonna and Mitelli has not been addressed.

There were two elements, I would suggest, at play here. Alongside the creative challenge of (Colonna and Mitelli's) *quadratura* was, more speculatively, the latent anxiety caused by the anticipated arrival of two potential artistic rivals, that anticipation acting as a further spur to Velázquez to engage with space on his own terms on canvas as the Italians did on theirs on a monumental scale in fresco. It is this second element I would like to consider first.

It is not difficult to see why these two pre-eminent *quadraturisti* might have aroused a degree of apprehension in Velázquez. In the light of Martínez's comments about Velázquez's marked improvement in 'arte perspectiva y arquitectura' after his first visit to Italy, one might speculate not only about the deficiencies in Velázquez's training to that date, but about a residual insecurity in this regard, not least with the prospect of the arrival of artists whose whole art glories in superlative perspectival constructions that fool the eye into believing illusionistic architecture is real and coterminous with the viewer's space. (That said, and deficiencies in Velázquez's training acknowledged, Palomino lists Velázquez's reading of standard works of art and perspective and Kemp comments on Velázquez's 'astonishingly full bibliography of advanced learning in pure and applied geometry, perspective and those exact sciences which use projective techniques'.³⁵) But Martínez's additional comments about the feelings of Velázquez and his son-in-law, Martínez del Mazo, towards fresco painting are even more revealing:

Ambos dos fueron muy enemigos de la pintura al fresco por causa de no hallarse con ánimo de resistir semejante trabajo, por ser en extremo de obrar muy dificultoso, y ser ejecutado con mucha prontitud y práctica habituada y el no poderse valer del natural, sino por el dibujo y gran consideración en las distancias.³⁶

Certainly, the speed of execution required in fresco painting, and the need for careful preparation and planning of the composition of a decorative scheme given the difficulty in making corrections, are alien to the practice of an artist whose *pentimenti* reveal changes of composition in the act of execution and, especially, of an artist who was

³² Martínez, *Discursos practicables*, 239-40. As Jonathan Brown notes, such an accusation was not without reason. See *Velázquez: Painter and Courtier* (New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1986), 60.

³³ Martínez, *Discursos practicables*, 240. For an overview of Velázquez's engagement with architectural projects, see Antonio Bonet Correa, 'Velázquez, arquitecto y decorador', *Archivo Español de Arte*, 33 (1960), 215-49.

³⁴ Brown, 'On the Meaning of *Las Meninas*', in *Collected Writings*, 50.

³⁵ Martin Kemp, *The Science of Art: Optical Themes in Western Art from Brunelleschi to Seurat* (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1990), 105; and Palomino, *Vida de Velázquez*, 24.

³⁶ Martínez, *Discursos practicables*, 242.

notorious for his ‘flema’—and who exasperated the monarch himself by this slowness, not least after his second stay in Italy.³⁷ Furthermore, as Aterido has recently suggested, the attitude towards fresco mentioned by Martínez may be occasioned by the more obviously manual nature of fresco in comparison to oil painting and therefore be connected with the Spanish desire to raise the status of painting from that of a manual to a liberal art.³⁸ So, a negative attitude to fresco shaped by temperament, skill, and concern for status. All this meant, of course, that Velázquez himself was unable to offer the king precisely what he so long sought.

Various critics have suggested that Velázquez strategically exploited his own slowness, whether to further his campaign to elevate the status of painting (Brown), or to heighten anticipation (Tiffany).³⁹ Not surprisingly, the latter was a familiar courtly strategy. As Gracián writes:

Hacen grada unos, para alcanzar sus fines, del deseo de los otros. Válense de la ocasión, y con la dificultad de la consecución irritanle el apetito. Prométense más del conato de la pasión que de la tibieza de la posesión; y al paso que crece la repugnancia, se apasiona más el deseo. Gran sutileza del conseguir el intento: conservar las dependencias.⁴⁰

There is no suggestion that Colonna and Mitelli consciously employed this strategy. But if we follow Gracián’s logic, then their very elusiveness over a seven-year pursuit must have increased their desirability; as Gracián also suggests, ‘si la presencia disminuye la fama, la ausencia la aumenta’.⁴¹ And by extension, there are grounds for speculating that such elusiveness and consequent heightened desirability may have occasioned Velázquez a degree of concern over his uncontested position as the pre-eminent painter at court, since he had already experienced being overshadowed by the presence of a foreign artist during Rubens’ second visit to Spain in 1628-29. On that occasion, he had seen his own celebrated equestrian portrait of Philip IV, which hung in the Alcázar and had had such an impact when finished that it had been publically displayed in the Calle Mayor,⁴² removed and replaced with one newly executed by the Flemish artist.⁴³

Having been created ‘apostador mayor de palacio’ in Feb 1652 at Philip’s own insistence, it is not a question of concern over falling from favour.⁴⁴ And his own work would not be supplanted by Colonna and Mitelli’s in the way that it had by Rubens’, given that they worked in a medium (fresco) and a genre (*quadratura*) entirely distinct from his (oil and, in the 1650s, primarily portraiture). But an anxiety at being, if not eclipsed, then

³⁷ See *Corpus velazqueño*, no.145, 140 (Cardinal-Infante to Philip IV, 26 May 1639); no.247, 218 (Philip IV to Duke of Infantado, 17 Feb 1650); no.338, 283 (Philip IV to Sor Luisa Magdalena, 3 June 1653); no.340, 286 (Philip IV to Sor Luisa Magdalena, 8 July 1653). And see Fernando Marías, ‘El género de *Las meninas*: los servicios de la familia’, in *Otras Meninas*, 247-78 (pp.267-68); and Brown, ‘Velázquez in the 1630s and 1640s’ and ‘Velázquez, Rubens and Van Dyck’, in *Collected Writings*, 151-63 (pp.162-63) and 201-310 (p.217).

³⁸ Aterido, ‘Mitelli, Colonna, Velázquez’, 260: ‘El esfuerzo físico que requería [la pintura al fresco] era más propio de albañiles que de artistas liberales. No es extraño que Velázquez buscara a los boloñeses para tales menesteres: tenían la preparación necesaria, pero también habían superado el prejuicio acerca de la dignidad de la pintura que perduraba en Madrid. Por eso Velázquez se implicó en el proceso creativo, en la idea, rehuyendo todo contacto con la cal, como hubiera hecho cualquier hidalgo del siglo XVII’.

³⁹ Brown says that ‘working slowly was a strategic move, a sort of artistic “work to rule”. By making his patrons wait and producing very few paintings, Velázquez was engaged in a power play to help in his campaign to elevate the status of his art’. See Brown, ‘Velázquez, Today and Tomorrow’, in *Collected Writings*, 415-31 (p.429). Tanya J. Tiffany, *Diego Velázquez’s Early Paintings and the Culture of Seventeenth-Century Seville* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2012), 146.

⁴⁰ Baltasar Gracián, *Oráculo manual y arte de prudencia*, edited by Emilio Blanco (Madrid: Cátedra, 1995), no.189, 206, spelling modernised.

⁴¹ Gracián, *Oráculo*, no.282, 252.

⁴² See Francisco Pacheco, *El arte de la pintura*, edited by Bonaventura Bassegoda i Hugas (Madrid: Cátedra, 1990), 205, and also n.30; Palomino, *Vida de Velázquez*, 26.

⁴³ Brown, *Velázquez: Painter and Courtier*, 65; Miguel Morán Turina, ‘Velázquez, un pintor antipático’, in *Estudios sobre Velázquez* (Madrid: Akal, 2006), 35-46 (p.46); Orso, *Philip IV and the Decoration of the Alcázar*, 52, 58; and Svetlana Alpers, *The Vexations of Art: Velázquez and Others* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005), 163-64.

⁴⁴ For his appointment, see *Corpus velazqueño*, no.312, 263-64. And for the mundane organisational tasks this position involved, see Brown, *Velázquez: Painter and Courtier*, 215.

overshadowed (even momentarily) that I am suggesting as something almost unavoidable in the precarious reality of court culture in which the monarch's favour was all—as Palomino states, when he describes the court artist Coello being passed over by Charles II in favour of Lucas Giordano newly arrived in Spain in the 1690s, ‘las determinaciones de los soberanos, sólo tocan a los inferiores obedecerlas, pero no examinarlas’⁴⁵—finds tangential support in a curious fact about Velázquez that suggests a degree of insecurity and/or self-protectionism, namely his lack of followers and, especially, his general failure to promote the careers of colleagues. This ‘temor atávico’ or ‘absoluta falta de generosidad’ Morán Turina attributes precisely to a profound fear of any competitor occasioned by the artist's experience during Ruben's visit to Madrid.⁴⁶ Given all this, then, Velázquez's depiction of himself in the *Meninas* in the same intimate space as the royal family is a clear and unprecedented assertion of his status in the court hierarchy, and anxiety at being potentially overshadowed can be read into such an assertion as much as, if not more than, a desire to affirm art's elevated status or to further his own pursuit of entry into a military order, the two principal ways this self-representation is standardly interpreted.⁴⁷

(If we take Brown's line of biographical interpretation, namely that Velázquez increasingly favoured courtly service over painting,⁴⁸ one might argue that for this reason Velázquez would *not* be anxious about foreign artists in the 1650s. But even so, in the 1650s he *did* continue as an artist, with royal portraiture occasioned by events within the royal family (the arrival of Philip's new queen, Mariana of Austria, the births of Margarita and Felipe Próspero), mythology (*Mercury and Argus*, and three other canvases for the Hall of Mirrors, now lost), and his masterpieces, the *Meninas* and the *Hilanderas*.)

Velázquez's reported views on fresco have already been mentioned. But in thinking about the *Meninas* as a work prompted in part by the creative challenge of (their) *quadratura*, a further question arises as to his views specifically on Colonna and Mitelli and on their form of Baroque illusionism. Although Palomino writes that the Italians were helped by Velázquez,⁴⁹ Colomer rightly comments that ‘we are left in ignorance of Velázquez's real opinion of Colonna and Mitelli. We do not know whether he regarded them as mere decorators, or if he considered their *trompe-l'œil* frescoes (he might have called them *trampantojos*) to belong to an artistic genre which combines both the skill of a painter and that of an architect’.⁵⁰ It has been asserted that Velázquez had a preference for Cortona's style of fresco decoration over Colonna and Mitelli's *quadratura*.⁵¹ The basis for this assertion is the

⁴⁵ Antonio Palomino de Castro y Velasco, *El museo pictórico y escala óptica*, edited by Juan A. Ceán y Bermúdez (Madrid: Aguilar, 1947), 1064.

⁴⁶ Morán Turina, ‘Velázquez, un pintor antipático’, 42, 43; see also 46. On Velázquez's jealous guarding of his own position as artist and consequent lack of promotion of colleagues, see also Juan Miguel Serrera, ‘El palacio como taller y el taller como palacio. Una reflexión más sobre *Las meninas*’, in *Otras meninas*, edited by Fernando Marías, 2nd edition (Madrid: Ediciones Siruela, 2007), 231-46 (pp.233, 242); and Brown, ‘Velázquez, Rubens and Van Dyck’, in *Collected Writings*, 201-310 (pp.226-27). For a dissenting voice to this line of interpretation, see Bartolomé Bennassar, *Velázquez: Vida* (Madrid: Cátedra, 2012), 125-26. On Velázquez's lack of followers, see Alpers, *Vexations of Art*, 259-60. Whilst Brown attributes this lack to ‘the sophistication of his art’ (*Velázquez: Painter and Courtier*, 266), elsewhere he writes of Velázquez's workshop that ‘the generally indifferent quality of the shop-pieces suggests that Velázquez did not supervise carefully the work of his assistants, who were thus denied the chance to paint at the master's elbow and to learn the secrets of his art’. See ‘Velázquez and the Evolution of High Baroque Painting in Madrid’ in *Collected Writings*, 91-101 (pp.93-94).

⁴⁷ For Palomino, the key figure in whose presence Velázquez depicts himself is Margarita. Drawing a parallel with a self-portrait by Titian holding a portrait of Philip II, he suggests that Velázquez has ensured his name will endure as long as Margarita's by depicting himself in her presence. See *Vida de Velázquez*, 45. On Titian's now-lost image, sent by him to Philip II, see Tom Nichols, *Titian and the End of the Venetian Renaissance* (London: Reaktion, 2013), 166, 168.

⁴⁸ For example, Brown, *Velázquez: Painter and Courtier*, 251.

⁴⁹ Palomino, *Vida de Velázquez*, 47. Palomino tells us that Velázquez housed the pair in the Casa del Tesoro; this is where Velázquez's own accommodation was (García Cueto, *Estancia*, 98).

⁵⁰ “‘Dar a Su Magestad algo Bueno’”, 72.

⁵¹ Raggi, ‘Note sul viaggio in Spagna’, 154, and Salort Pons, *Velázquez en Italia*, 168. And, for a different interpretation, Felipe Pereda and Angel Aterido Fernández, ‘Colonna y Mitelli en la corte de Felipe IV: la decoración del salón de los Espejos’, in *L'architettura dell'inganno: Quadraturismo e grande decorazione nella pittura di età barocca*, edited by Fauzia Farneti and Deanna Lenzi (Florence: Alinea Editrice, 2004), 31-47 (p.34).

(artistic) disagreement between Velázquez and Colonna recounted by Malvasia. (This disagreement is not mentioned by Palomino who presents a more seamless account of the Italians' stay in Madrid.) The disagreement was over the Spaniard's proposed scheme for the Salón de los Espejos, which was decorated in 1659 for the ceremonial visit of the Duke of Gramont to ask for María Teresa's hand in marriage to Louis XIV. Velázquez initially envisaged the lower walls being painted with *quadri riportati*, which he felt would better unify the room than *quadratura* given that its upper walls were decorated with works by Titian. Colonna refused on several grounds: that his speciality was not 'le figure, ma la quadratura, di figure poi, e di mille altre cose mista ed ornata'; that this proposal would leave idle his colleague, Mitelli; and that no painter would dare to compete with Titian's canvases.⁵² In the end, only the ceiling was decorated. Following Velázquez's scheme, Colonna and Mitelli, along with Francisco Rizi and Juan Carreño de Miranda, painted various fictive openings and the story of Pandora.⁵³ (Jusepe Martínez says that Velázquez was pressing to have the work completed, presumably because of the imminent ceremony with the Duke of Gramont, and that Colonna and Mitelli asked for assistants so as to finish the work.⁵⁴) According to Mitelli's son, the king was delighted with the Italians' work, but not with the Spaniards' share, which he wanted undone.⁵⁵

Whether this disagreement reveals an aesthetic preference *per se* for a specifically Cortona-style decorative scheme, with its more dominantly narrative and figurative content, over the predominantly architectural *quadratura* of Colonna and Mitelli, is difficult to say. But it does suggest that Velázquez had a preference, in this important state room at least, for a scheme that would have lessened the dominance on the walls specifically of the spatial illusionism typical of the Bolognese artists and that would have foregrounded instead the figurative over the architectural. Certainly, *quadri riportati* approximated his own artistic practice and foregrounded this in a way that *quadratura* did not. (Velázquez's insistence on *quadri riportati* could of course be interpreted in a more scheming fashion, namely that this would have precisely served to highlight Colonna and Mitelli's lack of pre-eminence in easel-painting.) If there was a degree of antipathy towards the Bolognese *quadraturisti* on Velázquez's part, then Colonna may have reciprocated, for Palomino recounts how, when Colonna was asked by the king who he thought the best artist at court was, he replied by citing the work of Carreño. Given the slight against Velázquez as a mere painter of heads mentioned above, the sting here for us at least lies in the fact that what Colonna praised was precisely Carreño's painting of a figure's head within a ceiling fresco.⁵⁶

What I have outlined assumes the long-accepted date of 1656 for the *Meninas*'s creation. But Brown has recently argued a case for the *Meninas* not being painted in 1656, but between Nov 1659 and April 1660.⁵⁷ If we accept this later date, then the same issues I have been considering remain in play, albeit slightly differently configured, since Colonna and Mitelli's *quadratura* is now being created before his, and indeed the king's, very eyes, and under his direction. Certainly, if Brown's 1659-60 supposition is correct, then the artist's *flema* was set aside; the speed of his execution accelerated in the presence of the frescoists who necessarily also worked fast.⁵⁸ And in the very presence of their distinctive style, Velázquez emphatically highlights his painterly difference to

⁵² Malvasia, *Felsina pittrice*, II, 407-08; García Cueto, *Estancia*, 121-22. For inconsistencies in Malvasia's account, see Aterido, 'Mitelli, Colonna, Velázquez y la pintura mural en la corte de Felipe IV', 246.

⁵³ On the Salón de los Espejos ceiling and this decorative scheme, see Palomino, *Vida de Velázquez*, 47-49, and specifically 48 for the *quadratura* elements. Also Orso, *Philip IV and the Decoration of the Alcázar*, 68-69, 104-07; García Cueto, *Estancia*, 118-46; Pereda and Aterido Fernández, 'Colonna y Mitelli en la corte de Felipe IV'; and Feinblatt, *Seventeenth-Century Bolognese Ceiling Decoration*, 107-09.

⁵⁴ Martínez, *Discursos practicables*, 242.

⁵⁵ García Cueto, *Estancia*, 139-40.

⁵⁶ Palomino, *Museo pictórico*, 1028-29.

⁵⁷ Jonathan Brown, *In the Shadow of Velázquez: A Life in Art History* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2014), 108. A weak spot in Brown's suggestion of this later date is the age of the *infanta* Margarita as depicted, an issue he silently addresses when he writes: 'My premise is that *Las Meninas* is purely a product of the painter's imagination. Fact is turned into fiction. Accordingly, the *infanta*'s figure could be as large or as small as met the needs of the composition' (109).

⁵⁸ On the speed of the *Meninas*' composition if painted at this later date, see Brown, *In the Shadow of Velázquez*, 109.

create what most modern critics interpret as, in part, his artistic manifesto.⁵⁹ But his work is still in many ways in debate with Colonna and Mitelli. It is to the firing of Velázquez's artistic imagination by the Bolognese *quadraturisti* that I now turn.

Points of Convergence and Divergence

The *quadratura* practice of Colonna and Mitelli is not a direct source for any specific element in the *Meninas*, and indeed elements that both share are commonly found in works by other artists. The dog at the bottom right of the *Meninas* is a good case in point. Tintoretto's *Christ Washing the Disciples' Feet* is often cited as the model for Velázquez's mastiff,⁶⁰ and dogs are obviously found throughout Renaissance and Baroque art. This said, they are especially common in the intimate, courtly, virtual environments created in any number of *quadratura* schemes, from Veronese in the Villa Barbaro to Colonna and Mitelli, who depict two large dogs in the Sala Grande in the Palazzo Spada and a smaller lap-dog in the Gran Salone at Sassuolo. They also appear in the large-scale canvases depicting architectural space of Samuel van Hoogstraten that are designed to have a similar *trompe l'œil* impact. Given their ubiquity in works of full-scale spatial illusionism such as these, they become not only markers of domestic interiority, but of illusionism *per se*, and are always positioned on the boundary between real and illusionistic space, exactly as in Velázquez's canvas.⁶¹ (Their liminal positioning guards the boundary between two spaces that are otherwise invitingly coextensive, wittily deterring the viewer from stepping into illusionistic space.) Whilst Colonna and Mitelli are not Velázquez's source here, then, all three artists are using and positioning dogs in their compositions in line with illusionistic practice.

But Colonna and Mitelli are not simply a general catalyst for Velázquez's unprecedented spatial meditation, for there are a series of close and suggestive correspondences between their work and the *Meninas*. These can be summarised as follows: the formidable and absorbing illusion of space, architecturally articulated; the scale of that space matching the viewer's space; the direct interpenetration and intertwining of real and illusionistic space; the population of illusionistic space with courtiers and functionaries casually portrayed in inconsequential activities; the absolute centrality of the glance and the gaze; the folding of a viewer into the illusion.

As in *quadratura*, receding space is architecturally delineated in the *Meninas*, albeit without the precise demarcation of architectural features characteristic of *quadratura* whose architecture, as a form of *trompe l'œil*, is necessarily sharply articulated. In the *Meninas*, linear perspective is both less overt and more subtle than, for example, the traditional deployment of chequered flooring used by Velázquez in *Joseph's Coat Presented to Jacob*, and is enforced by aerial perspective which is not used in *quadratura* schemes where clarity of focus and thus of perception is always sought.⁶² The space depicted in both *quadratura* and the *Meninas* is real; in the former because it is always presented as a seamless continuation of the viewer's space; in the latter because it depicts an actual room in the Alcázar, one therefore known to Philip IV, the 'cuarto bajo del príncipe'.⁶³

But the primary connection between *quadratura* and the *Meninas* is not so much their respective creations of highly illusionistic depictions of space, though this is a key connection, but the direct engagement of that space

⁵⁹ See, for example, Brown, *In the Shadow of Velázquez*, 109-12.

⁶⁰ Paul Barolsky, 'A Source for *Las meninas*', *Source: Notes in the History of Art*, 10 (1991), 22-25. Barolsky lists a number of similarities between the *Meninas* and *Christ Washing the Disciples' Feet*, a canvas Velázquez hung in the sacristy of the Escorial in 1656, the same year he painted his own masterpiece. Tintoretto's canvas thus represents another stimulus, and indeed challenge, to Velázquez's pictorial imagination as he created the *Meninas*. On this, see my 'Baroque Space', 782-83. The self-contained *otherness* of Tintoretto's monumental setting differentiates his architectural space from that in both Bolognese *quadratura* and the *Meninas*.

⁶¹ Or indeed in Van Eyck's *Arnolfini Wedding Portrait*, another possible source for this as for other aspects of the *Meninas*.

⁶² For Velázquez's use of aerial perspective as this evolves across his œuvre, see Peter Cherry and Carmen Garrido, 'De la línea a la luz: Velázquez y el espacio', in *Symposium Internacional Velázquez: Actas*, 207-14.

⁶³ On this identifiable setting, and for an interpretation of the significance to the *Meninas* of the canvases it contained, see Orso, *Philip IV and the Decoration of the Alcázar*, 165-82. As Orso notes (178), the *Meninas* is the only work by Velázquez to depict the royal family in a recognizable palace interior. See also Moffitt, 'Velázquez in the Alcázar Palace in 1656'.

with the real space of the viewer and the concomitant fusion of the two. In *quadratura*, of course, this is achieved by making real and fictive space exactly coterminous. In the *Meninas*, in contrast, the folding of the two spaces hinges in part on the mirror at the back of the composition. Although it is now critically accepted that this mirror reflects the internal canvas at which Velázquez shows himself at work, as Palomino had actually suggested at the start of the eighteenth century,⁶⁴ it nevertheless remains true that Velázquez creates a deliberate ambiguity here which is unavoidably felt by a viewer, namely that the mirror reflects real space outwith the canvas.⁶⁵ (Such ambiguity is occasioned in part by his less-than-mechanical use of linear perspective.⁶⁶) As such, the viewer's space is folded into the work. This would have been even more strongly felt when viewed by Philip himself. (The unavoidable ambiguity centred on the mirror—whose reflection, on one reading, folds real and illusionistic space together, and on another, doesn't—has a parallel in the way physical movement through a *quadratura*-decorated environment disconcertingly aligns and un-aligns real and fictive architectural space. In both, there is an inevitable shifting between conflicting positions, one interpretative, one perceptive, both involving our location vis-à-vis the depicted space.)

The use of reflection to suggest a direct link with real space is emphatically reinforced by the figures within Velázquez's canvas who look directly out at the viewer's space. The glances and gazes of figures in contemporary dress also play an important part in the folding of real and fictive space into one unitary space in *quadratura*. In Colonna and Mitelli's schemes, courtiers, servants and officials return our looks and glances as we share the singular courtly space created by the seamless fusion of the real and the illusionistic. And just as in *quadratura*, scale is important: the figures in the *Meninas* are coterminous with real space through being approximately life-size; they are not *there*, but *here*. The gazes of Velázquez, the Infanta Margartita, José Nieto, Isabel de Velasco, the unidentified *guardadamas*, and Maribárbola suggest a narrative sequence in the very loosest sense—a (sudden) awareness of someone (the king and queen?) entering or already in that portion of the 'galería del cuarto del Príncipe' that corresponds with the viewer's space—just like the glances, looks and gestures of contemporary figures in Colonna and Mitelli's rooms who are, precisely, responding to *us*, to our arrival and/or our presence. And indeed, if we follow Palomino's reading of what the mirror reflects in the *Meninas*, namely the front of the canvas Velázquez depicts himself working on, then the figures looking out are, at least in part, looking at us and are thus analogous to the *trompe l'œil* courtiers in the Italians' *quadratura*.

Although the sheer number of figures in the *Meninas* looking into our space surpasses that in any single work by Colonna and Mitelli, they, like Velázquez, create works that foreground sight and optical play. In the case of the Italians, they further emphasise the act of looking by having figures raise spectacles to their eyes (Sala Grande, Palazzo Spada; Public Audience chamber, Pitti Palace; Gran Salone, Sassuolo) or stare through a telescope into the viewer's space (Sala Grande, Palazzo Spada; Private Audience chamber, Pitti Palace; the now-obliterated fresco in the courtyard at Sassuolo⁶⁷). (This foregrounding of looking by means of a material object has its counterpart in the mirror within the *Meninas*.) In both the Italians' and the Spaniard's work, therefore, the act of looking, central to artistic appreciation, and of being under scrutiny, central to court culture, is foregrounded as our gaze is reciprocated by figures in the canvas or on the walls and ceilings.⁶⁸ Van Eyck's *Arnolfini Wedding Portrait*, which hung in the Alcázar at the time, has long been seen as a compositional influence on Velázquez's use of the mirror, but Colonna and Mitelli's *quadratura* practice also provides a suggestive parallel for the intensely scopic

⁶⁴ Palomino, *Vida de Velázquez*, 45. For an extrapolation of the perspectival scheme employed in the *Meninas*, see Kemp, *Science of Art*, 107-08.

⁶⁵ On this, see Leo Steinberg, 'Velázquez' *Las Meninas*', *October*, 19 (1981), 45-54 (p.52) and Svetlana Alpers, 'Interpretation without Representation, or, The Viewing of *Las Meninas*', *Representations*, 1 (1983), 31-42 (p.42).

⁶⁶ On the general opacity of the work's perspectival construction, see Hubert Damisch, *The Origin of Perspective*, translated by John Goodman (Cambridge, MA, and London: MIT Press, 1995), 441; Marías, 'El género de *Las Meninas*', 264; and Kemp, *Science of Art*, 108.

⁶⁷ For a seventeenth-century description of their *quadratura* in the palace courtyard, see Angelo Mazza, "In questa bella compagnia d'Amore e di Fortuna...": La decorazione pittorica', in *Il Palazzo di Sassuolo*, 57-76 (p.60).

⁶⁸ For looking and gazing in *quadratura* schemes, see my 'Inhabiting Deception: *Quadratura* and the Courtier' (in press).

scenario of the *Meninas*.⁶⁹ This said, it must be acknowledged that, by means of the mirror, the complexity of the relationship between viewer and canvas, between real and fictive space, is essentially without resolution and is therefore more complex, ambiguous and challenging than is ever the case with Colonna and Mitelli.

The contemporary figures inhabiting the fictive architectural space within Colonna and Mitelli's schemes are surprisingly numerous: 22 in the Gran Salone in Sassuolo, for example. These court characters often seem 'generic'—a halberdier, a black servant, a page, a musician, a courtier, a lady—but many may actually have been recognisable individuals from the court. So, it has been suggested that the elderly man at the foot of a staircase in the Private Audience chamber in the Pitti Palace may be Diacinto Maria Marmi, the Medici 'guardaroba ufficiale'.⁷⁰ The incorporation of actual individuals into the fictive architecture that is coterminous with the real further strengthens the reality of the fictive space in a playful fashion and was not uncommon in *quadratura*: Veronese, for example, includes the children and wife of Marcantonio Barbaro within the illusionistic architecture he created at Maser in the Villa Barbaro. Again, this element is taken much further in the *Meninas*, given both the number of individuals depicted, most known only thanks to Palomino, and the elevated status of three of them (the Infanta and, indirectly, Philip and Mariana). But this is a difference in degree rather than in kind.

The *Meninas* is difficult to categorize according to contemporary artistic genres. (And unless simply labelled 'decoration', the same is true of *quadratura*.) Whilst portraying real individuals, it lacks the singular focus and the gravity of Habsburg portraiture; and whilst showing something (rather ill-defined) happening, it is not a work of *istoria*, because what we have is domestic, not a major or significant episode (Classical, Biblical or contemporary) of historic import. But what is depicted resonates strongly with *quadratura* practice, particularly Colonna and Mitelli's. Both their work and Velázquez's create a large-scale illusion of architectural space commingled with the real space of a palace in which contemporary courtiers and court figures or types are shown casually engaged in the mundane and routine life of the palace. The key words here are casual and routine; in this respect, both are an elevated form of genre painting. It is precisely this emphasis on depicting the mundane, the non-transcendent, in such a space which links the *Meninas* with Baroque *quadratura*. Such a suggestion does not obviously exclude further interpretation as to the significance of the figures represented in the *Meninas*; it simply proposes a contemporary parallel for their inconsequential or casual activity, a parallel that is strengthened precisely by their similar placement in illusionistic space that is enfolded so compellingly into our own. The casual mundanity of the contemporary figures depicted by Colonna and Mitelli is echoed by Velázquez and made integral to what is now broadly accepted as the intention behind his tour de force, namely the pursuit of social status (becoming a knight of Santiago) and the demonstration of the nobility of painting, he and his act of painting being presented casually as a routine part not simply of court life but of the monarch's. (Velázquez's inclusion of himself within monumental illusionistic space will be repeated by later *quadraturisti* such as Lucas Giordano who depicts himself looking down into the viewer's space from a fictive window in the *quadratura* around the ceiling of the sacristy of Toledo cathedral (1698).)

A final, and admittedly more tangential point of similarity between the *Meninas* and *quadratura* is their exploitation of things that cannot fully be seen. This is a key strategy used by *quadraturisti* who offer partial glimpses of spatial, figurative and decorative elements within their fictive architecture to arouse, only inevitably to frustrate, curiosity. A good example is found in Colonna and Mitelli's Private Audience chamber in the Pitti Place which includes faux monochrome panels with episodes from the life of Alexander which are only partially visible because 'concealed' by the fictive architecture. The *trompe l'œil* nature of the architecture encourages the viewer to move in order to get a fuller view, only, obviously, to have that desire thwarted precisely because of the architecture's fictive nature. In the *Meninas*, of course, we are confronted with the unusually large expanse of the reverse of the internal canvas which seemingly frustrates the viewer with the unknowability of its subject. Even if

⁶⁹ This link between Van Eyck's work and Velázquez's is mentioned by many critics. For a detailed consideration, see Linda Seidel, *Jan van Eyck's Arnolfini Portrait: Stories of an Icon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 194-98. Also see Damisch, *Origin of Perspective*, 439.

⁷⁰ See Marilena Mosco, 'L'appartamento d'Estate dei granduchi', in *Palazzo Pitti: L'arte e la storia*, edited by Marco Chiarini (Florence: Nardini Editore, 2003), 90-104 (p.102).

the mirror is taken to reflect this canvas, its subject remains, as with such elements in *quadratura*, forever partially occluded given that the reflection is strictly limited.

Without suggesting a straightforward cause-and-effect relationship between the *quadratura* of Colonna and Mitelli and the *Meninas*, then, the Italians' form of powerful spatial illusionism is more than just a telling context in which to place, and against which to interpret Velázquez's work. It was, I am suggesting, an important spur to Velázquez producing the *Meninas*, their work representing a pictorial challenge and their arrival arguably a cause of anxiety leading to the challenge being taken up. This can be seen in the convergences just outlined between their otherwise very different work—as well as in the very fact that Velázquez, as I have suggested, chooses to create a complex work of spatial illusionism at precisely this point in his career. Like their *quadratura*, the *Meninas* is an intensely scenographic space that links directly with the viewer's space. That Velázquez similarly stages in that monumental illusionistic space court figures engaged in routine activity, and that they react not simply to something in our viewing space but to us as viewers, strongly suggests these are not incidental parallels. Velázquez was in debate, to use Brown's term, with Italian *quadratura* as practiced by the Bolognese artists, and such *quadratura* was a template for his meditation on space, both real and illusionistic. I would not therefore agree with Kemp that the *Meninas* has almost nothing in common with the illusionism of Colonna and Mitelli.⁷¹ But I would broadly agree that Velázquez, in painting his canvas, was 'openly challenging the perceptual limitations of the Italians' geometrical mechanics'. For Kemp, this was part of Velázquez's desire 'to give a wider sense of the subtle processes of vision and how they can be magically evoked or paralleled in the medium of paint than was possible with the drier mechanisms of linear perspective and geometrical shadow projection'.⁷² Colonna and Mitelli, according to Kemp, were producing 'a variety of mechanical illusions'. In contrast, Velázquez sought 'a truly natural illusion by capturing more of the vagaries of sight itself' through a 'heightened awareness of other optical factors', such as 'elusive light, veiling shadow, fleeting motion, ambiguous translucency, detached highlights'.⁷³

The Haptic, the Optic, and the *mano ocular*

Leaving to one side the loaded terms used which do little justice to the impact of Colonna and Mitelli's work at its best ('perceptual limitations', 'geometrical mechanics', 'drier mechanisms of linear perspective', 'mechanical illusions'), Kemp offers a broad characterisation of the distinct technical means used by the Bolognese *quadraturisti* and by Velázquez to create (spatial) illusions—the one strictly geometric, the other responsive to the 'vagaries of sight itself'. In this final section, I want very briefly to contrast the specific interplay between style, perception, and illusion in Velázquez and the Bolognese *quadraturisti*, and to do so by focusing on the hand.

Despite the points of convergence between Colonna and Mitelli's *quadratura* and the *Meninas* in terms of content and the use of both real and fictive space, Velázquez's style self-evidently differs sharply from the Italians'. Working in different media, their respective styles also broadly embody the distinction between the smooth and the rough manner, between 'dibujo' and 'colorido' (a particular focus, following Italian theory, of Golden Age writers), and therefore between the linear and the painterly (to use Wölfflin's long-standing stylistic binary).⁷⁴ Unlike the Bolognese *quadraturisti*'s precise delineation of contour, which is, not surprisingly, especially marked in the architectural elements of their schemes, Velázquez was famous for his *manchas* and *borrones*, seemingly random brushstrokes which, when viewed from the right distance, cohere perfectly into the form of the object

⁷¹ Kemp, *Science of Art*, 105.

⁷² Kemp, *Science of Art*, 108.

⁷³ Kemp, *Science of Art*, 105. This view of Velázquez's art finds a parallel in Brown's discussion of the artist's mature technique. See *Velázquez: Painter and Courtier*, 261, and *Collected Writings*, 163, 402, 403.

⁷⁴ For the Spanish theoretical context, see Gridley McKim-Smith, Greta Andersen-Bergdoll, Richard Newman, *Examining Velázquez* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988), 15-24. On the Italian context, see Philip Sohm, *Pittoresco: Marco Boschini, his Critics, and their Critiques of Painterly Brushwork in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991). And for an excellent discussion of 'rough' versus 'smooth' in Dutch theory and practice, see Thijs Weststeijn, *The Visible World: Samuel van Hoogstraten's Art Theory and the Legitimation of Painting in the Dutch Golden Age*, translated by Beverley Jackson and Lynne Richards (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2008), Chapter V.

depicted.⁷⁵ This style was associated with Venetian art, and with Titian above all. The sense of casual ease of execution, of *sprezzatura*, that it conveyed belied the skill it required, as one contemporary noted of Velázquez.⁷⁶ In his discussion of the linear and the painterly style, Wölfflin described the former in terms of touch ('the consistently firm, clear delimitation of solids furnishes the viewer with a degree of certainty, as though he could trace them with his fingers'), the latter of sight ('drawing and modelling no longer coincide geometrically with the plastic basis of the form; they merely give the optical appearance of the thing').⁷⁷ It is the incitement of the respective senses that I want to take up here.

In different ways, the work of both the Italians and Velázquez encourages 'the mind to dwell on perceiving as a process'.⁷⁸ Each foregrounds an aspect of execution—in the one, the technical mastery of perspective; in the other, facture—that highlights perception in and through the very act of viewing. But by eliminating evidence of facture and awareness of surface, *quadratura* creates an illusion that induces an almost instinctive desire to touch (so as to verify). The tactile dimension of sharpness of contour suggested figuratively by Wölfflin is taken quite literally in seventeenth-century accounts of responses to *trompe l'œil*.⁷⁹ These tend to describe the incitement to touch that *trompe l'œil* provokes. Pepys, for example, records his desire to touch painted drops of water in a Van Hoogstraten still-life;⁸⁰ Chiflet, chronicling the Cardinal-Infante's stay in Antwerp in 1635 and his visit to the Jesuit garland painter, Daniel Seghers, describes his flowers as so real that the hand was tempted to pick them;⁸¹ Van Hoogstraten writes of illusionistic architectural features, identified as probably in the Villa Farnesina, that artists were only convinced were painted by touching them;⁸² whilst the emperor Ferdinand III is said to have reached out to remove the illusionistic engraving depicted in a *trompe l'œil* canvas by Sebastian Stoskopff.⁸³ Such reactions,

⁷⁵ See, for example, Palomino's comments on Velázquez's portrait of Adrián Pulido Pareja (*Vida de Velázquez*, 32). As McKim-Smith notes, the issue of proximity and distance in viewing was a cliché (*Examining Velázquez*, 15-16). On Velázquez's technique, see Larry Keith, 'Velázquez's Painting Technique', in *Velázquez*, edited by Dawson W. Carr, with Xavier Bray, John H. Elliott, Larry Keith and Javier Portús (London: National Gallery, 2006), 70-89. For Van Mander and Van Hoogstraten on this issue, see Weststeijn (*Visible World*, 237) who refers to the 'double perspective' necessitated by this style (237, and neatly summarised on 357-58).

⁷⁶ Juan Francisco Andrés Uztarroz, *Obelisco histórico* (1646), cited in *Corpus velazqueño*, no.192, 172. Following Vasari's discussion of the style of Titian's *poesie*, where the question of viewing at the correct distance is also rehearsed, this sentiment became something of a commonplace.

⁷⁷ Heinrich Wölfflin, *Principles of Art History: The Problem of the Development of Style in Early Modern Art*, translated by Jonathan Blower, with introductory essays by Evonne Levy and Tristan Weddigen (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2015), 102, 103; see also 109.

⁷⁸ Alpers, *Vexations of Art*, 27. Alpers is discussing Vermeer's representation of the artist's hand as a 'shaded blob' in his *Art of Painting*. In the context of my discussion of Velázquez's depiction of hands below, it is worth noting that this description might be used of Maribárbola's right hand in the *Meninas*.

⁷⁹ The notion of tactility is employed by various critics in ways distinct from my use here. Riegl's use of tactile/haptic, for example, refers to art that requires the viewer to perceive it close to, whilst Ortega y Gasset, writing specifically of Velázquez, suggests that his 'realism' reduces objects to the purely visual by removing the solid, ergo the tactile, dimension of reality.

⁸⁰ Weststeijn, *Visible World*, 151.

⁸¹ Auguste Castan, 'Contribution à la biographie du portraitiste A. de Vries', *Bulletins de l'Académie Royale des Sciences, des Lettres et des Beaux-Arts de Belgique*, 7, 3^{me} série (1884), 199-202, (pp.201-02). On this aspect of Seghers, see my 'Pied Beauty: The Baroque Microcosms of Daniel Seghers', *BSS*, 93 (2016), 1286-300 (pp.1290-91).

⁸² See Samuel van Hoogstraten, *Introduction à la haute école de l'art de peinture*, translated by Jan Blanc (Geneva: Droz, 2006), Book VIII, Chapter VIII, 455 (on the identification of this scheme with Peruzzi, see note 123).

⁸³ See Joachim von Sandrart's 1675 account in the documentary appendix to *Sébastien Stoskopff 1597-1657. Un maître de la nature morte*, edited by Michèle-Caroline Heck (Paris: Éditions de la Réunion des musées nationaux, 1997), 224. This is also discussed by Sylvia Böhmer, 'Imitation et invention picturale—les gravures peintes dans les natures mortes de Sébastien Stoskopff', in *Sébastien Stoskopff 1597-1657*, 94-107 (p.102). For Ferdinand also being deceived by a still life by Hoogstraten, see the account by his pupil: 'Arnold Houbraken's References to Samuel van Hoogstraten and his "Introduction to the Academy of Painting"', edited and translated by Hendrik J. Horn, in *The Universal Art of Samuel van Hoogstraten (1627-1678): Painter, Writer, and Courtier*, edited by Thijs Weststeijn (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2013), 241-58 (p.247).

genuine as they may have been, are ultimately traceable to one of the founding tropes of painterly deception, namely Pliny's account of Zeuxis wanting to draw back a curtain painted by Parrhasios so as to see the painting he believed lay beneath (*Natural History*, 35.36). In describing Colonna and Mitelli's works in Madrid, Palomino also has recourse to this motif of touch as a mode of verification:

En el mismo cuarto ['cuarto bajo de Su Majestad'] pintaron una galería, que tiene vista al Jardín de la Reina; en ésta pintó Mitelli todas las paredes, enlazando algo la arquitectura verdadera con la fingida, con tal perspectiva, arte, y gracia, que engañaba la vista, siendo necesario valerse del tacto, para persuadirse a que era pintado.⁸⁴

As Palomino suggests, such is the power of the visual illusion created by the Italians that real and fictive architectural features collapse into one another and touch becomes the only means to distinguish between the two. (The almost instinctive desire to touch is evident to anyone who has watched viewers react surreptitiously to *quadratura* schemes when guards are not looking.)

Such reactions and responses need to be read in the context of the impact of scepticism in seventeenth-century Europe. This had occasioned a profound distrust of sense data given the perceived lack of criteria to distinguish between true and false sense impressions and, since sight was seen as the most significant sense, the prime examples of the fallibility of the senses tended to be optical illusions. The resulting epistemological crisis led eventually to the new philosophy and the empiricism of the new science. But it also shaped profoundly Baroque culture which, for both moral and ludic ends, became obsessed with appearance and reality and with the difficulty, if not the impossibility, of distinguishing between the two.⁸⁵ The very rise and spread of *quadratura* during this period is one manifestation of scepticism's cultural impact. In the context of such scepticism, touch, as a sense involving direct contact with an object, exemplified the direct, empirical experience needed for epistemological assent, touch viscerally verifying the evidence of the eyes, as in the example of Doubting Thomas.⁸⁶ This is encapsulated in the *occultata manus*, an open hand with an eye in its palm. This emblem was used as a warning against credulity by Alciato, and as a way of emphasising the need for caution and direct scrutiny prior to assent by Gracián.⁸⁷ With its dual emphasis on sight and touch, the *mano ocular*, to use Gracián's term, also neatly encapsulates what contemporaries presented as a normative response to *trompe l'œil*, of which *quadratura*, given its scale, is an extreme example, a response that involved initial *engaño* (sight) and subsequent *desengaño* (touch), with touch here testing and amending sight.

Touch as a means of verifying the reality of what the eye has seen arises in Palomino's response to Colonna and Mitelli's work precisely because their illusionism is a form of *trompe l'œil*. But despite its scale being comparable to *quadratura*, Velázquez's illusionism in the *Meninas* is self-evidently not. In the *Meninas*, as in other late works by the artist, the visibility of facture profoundly shapes both the form of illusionism and, consequently, the viewer's (sensory) response to it. As with many of his court portraits of the 1650s, facture is most strikingly evident in the figures' costumes such as, here, Margarita's dress, and especially its collar, decorative rosette, and sleeves. In Hals, loose brushwork has been interpreted as a means of animating his portraits.⁸⁸ Whilst in some works, not least *Las hilanderas*, brushwork does indeed brilliantly convey motion—of

⁸⁴ Palomino, *Vida de Velázquez*, 47 (spelling modernized). On this particular work, see García Cueto, *Estancia*, 117.

⁸⁵ See my *The Challenges of Uncertainty: An Introduction to Seventeenth-Century Spanish Literature* (London: Duckworth, 1998) and *Arts of Perception: The Epistemological Mentality of the Spanish Baroque, 1580-1720* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007).

⁸⁶ Recommended as a model, for example, by Fadrique Furió Ceriol, *El conejo y consejeros del príncipe*, edited by Henry Méchoulan (Madrid: Tecnos, 1993), 75.

⁸⁷ Andrea Alciato, *Emblemata* (Lyons, 1550), translated and annotated by Betty I. Knott, with introduction by John Manning (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1996), 22. For Gracián's use of the image, see *El Criticón*, edited by M. Romera-Navarro, vol. II (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1939), II.1 and II.2, 25, 43, 63, and *Oráculo*, no.222, 224. For an early modern Spanish explication of Alciato's emblem, see Diego López, *Declaración magistral sobre las emblemas de Andrés Alciato* (Nájera: Juan de Mongastón, 1615), fols.62r-64v.

⁸⁸ Christopher D.M. Atkins, *The Signature Style of Frans Hals: Painting, Subjectivity, and the Market in Early Modernity* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2012), 41-42. For a contrast in this respect between Hals and Juan Pantoja de la Cruz, see 80.

the spinning wheel, for example—broadly speaking Velázquez's portraits are, as it were, static, following in this respect Habsburg protocol. In contrast to Hals, Velázquez's loose brushwork, which is in any case far more restrained than his Dutch contemporary,⁸⁹ does not animate the figures so much as the canvas's surface.

Discussing Velázquez's style and his form of naturalism, Ortega y Gasset asserts that Velázquez had grasped that 'las cosas en su realidad son «poco más o menos», son sólo aproximadamente ellas mismas, no terminan en un perfil riguroso, no tienen superficies inequívocas y pulidas, sino que flotan en un margen de imprecisión que es su verdadera presencia'.⁹⁰ Such imprecision is labelled a 'dematerialization of form' by Newman.⁹¹ The result is that in late Velázquez, self-containment and self-possession (demanded of the prince and the courtier) and self-disintegration (as a result of the brushwork) are held in tension as the brush both defines and dematerialises form. This is characteristic of Velázquez's late style *per se*, not simply of his painting of hands, but Ortega memorably expresses its effect precisely with reference to the hand when he asks '¿Quién es capaz de señalar dónde empieza y dónde acaba una mano en *Las Meninas*?'⁹² A typology of Velázquez's painting of hands would include those whose edges fade imperceptibly, *sfumato*-like, into the shadows or the air (e.g. the *menina* Isabel Velasco's right hand; the lower edge of Nicolás Pertusato's left hand); those that seem either to materialise from or to dissolve into thin air (the fingers of both hands of the kneeling *menina*, María Agustina Sarmiento; the ghostly traces of the fingers of Nicolás Pertusato's right hand); and those where the pigment defining their form perceptibly streaks into what is behind or surrounding them (the fingers of Margarita's left hand resting on her dress). This lack of clear delineation and delimitation, along with the frequent visibility of facture, is distinctive to Velázquez's painting of hands; it is not found, for example, in the court portraits of his contemporaries and successors Martínez del Mazo or Carreño de Miranda.

If we juxtapose the hand as painted by Velázquez and the hand as a veridical instrument, then we arrive at an inadvertent paradox: the agent of sceptical verification—the *mano ocular*—is itself indistinct, fluid etc.. What is posited as confirming an illusion as such in the case of *quadratura* is itself emphatically and undeniably an illusion in Velázquez. In contrast to *trompe l'œil quadratura*, Velázquez does not make you want to touch, but to look, as the eye colludes in the creation of the illusion from the *manchas* discernible on the canvas. The eye is actively involved, therefore, rather than passively deceived. Furthermore, if Colonna and Mitelli's smooth style, and the lack of awareness of surface that this facilitates, incites or, in Palomino's discussion of their work, requires our touch (to verify that the eye has been deceived), Velázquez's style, in contrast, makes us aware rather of *his* touch for, as Knox has argued, the visibility of facture serves by default to foreground 'the animating actions of the hand' of the artist.⁹³ *Quadratura* occludes, however momentarily, its status as a product of artifice precisely by deceiving us into taking it as real, as all *trompe l'œil* seeks to do.⁹⁴ But Velázquez's style in the *Meninas*, just as much as his depicted presence within it, never for a moment lets us forget him as artist. Consequently, unlike *quadratura*, this powerful and compelling illusion does not seek to deceive; rather, its status as art is flaunted through the way the

⁸⁹ As Brown notes, Velázquez 'carefully avoided the virtuoso brushwork used by painters like Rubens and Hals, whose show of skill sometimes distracts the viewer from the effect of "truth"' (*Velázquez: Painter and Courtier*, 204).

⁹⁰ José Ortega y Gasset, *Papeles sobre Velázquez y Goya* (Madrid: Alianza, 2005), 40; see also 266.

⁹¹ McKim-Smith, *Examining Velázquez*, 94.

⁹² José Ortega y Gasset, 'Del realismo en pintura' in *Mocedades*, 6th edition (Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, 1964), 126-31 (p.128). Writing in 1912, Ortega is countering the view of Velázquez as a realist to align him with impressionism. For Ortega's view of Velázquez here, see Enrique Lafuente Ferrari, 'Velázquez en Ortega y Gasset' and 'El mensaje del arte velazqueño' in *Velázquez o la salvación de la circunstancia, y otros escritos sobre el pintor*, edited by José Riello (Madrid: CEEH, 2013), 97-145 (pp.132-35) and 197-201 (p.199).

⁹³ Giles Knox, *The Late Paintings of Velázquez: Theorizing Painterly Performance* (Ashgate: Farnham, 2009), 169.

⁹⁴ This occlusion is particularly true of Colonna and Mitelli's work at Sassuolo and the Palazzo Spada where there is minimal disjunction between real and fictive architecture of the sort that occurs in the Pitti Palace. There, due to the dramatic raising of the ceiling through fictive architecture, the illusion is only perfect when viewed from the middle of the room which means that the viewer necessarily moves from sharp disjunction to total illusion, and is consequently made aware of the artists' skill from the onset.

eye is made simultaneously aware both of the striking reality of an object represented and of the brushwork that forms it. In contrast to the illusionism of *quadratura*, therefore, this *is* truth, because it doesn't lie.